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Gender, life-cycle and family “strategies” among the poor: the Barcelona workhouse, 1762-1805¹

Dr Montserrat Carbonell

Departament d’Història i Institucions Econòmiques
Universitat de Barcelona
Avinguda Diagonal, 690, Torre 2, 4a planta
08034 Barcelona
montsecarbonell@ub.edu

Dr Julie Marfany (corresponding author)

Department of History
Durham University
43, North Bailey
Durham
DH1 3EX
julie.marfany@durham.ac.uk

I

In a seminal article some years ago, David Reher suggested that a deep divide existed and continues to exist between north and south Europe in terms of family forms and particularly the strength of family ties.² Put simply, the nuclear family was more predominant in northern Europe, the extended family in southern Europe and, more importantly, ties of family loyalty and obligation were stronger in southern Europe. Children left home upon marriage in northern Europe or often earlier in order to go into service, while children in southern Europe remained in the parental home for longer and, in areas where the stem family dominated, often brought spouses into the parental home after marriage. The elderly were thus more likely to reside with children in southern than in northern Europe, a feature that holds true today. Moreover, as Reher and others point out, ‘spatial proximity’ or close contact with kin remains an important feature of southern European societies beyond the co-residence implied by such terms as ‘extended’ or ‘stem family’.³

For many historians, these differences in family forms and family ties have important implications. The ‘north-west European marriage pattern’ of late marriage for both sexes, neo-local household formation and high proportions never marrying has been credited with being the backbone of the industrious revolution, labour mobility and high female labour force participation.⁴ More important for the purposes of this article, however, is a further question raised by Reher and others concerning the effect of family ties on the demand for welfare.⁵ In Peter Laslett’s conception of ‘nuclear hardship’, nuclear families in northern Europe and particularly the elderly, lacked the protection from poverty offered elsewhere by extended kin, and thus were reliant on the support offered by ‘the collectivity’.⁶ In turn, the existence of kin networks in southern Europe obviated the requirement for the ‘collectivity’, whether the parish or later the state, to provide for the poor. If the extended family were vulnerable to poverty, it was earlier in the life-cycle, when numbers of dependent children were highest.⁷ Where individuals did make use of poor relief, it was only because kin were absent: thus,

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² Reher, ‘Persistent ties’.

³ Viazzo and Zanolli, ‘Welfare as a moral obligation’.

⁴ De Vries, *Industrious revolution*, pp. 9-19; de Moor and van Zanden, ‘Girl power’.

⁵ Reher, ‘Persistent ties’; Heerma van Voss, ‘Poor relief institutions’.

⁶ Laslett, ‘Family, kinship and collectivity’.

⁷ Viazzo, ‘Family structures’.

urban charitable institutions catered mostly for migrants detached from their families of origin, especially in crisis years of high prices or epidemics.⁸

Although there have been important challenges to the notion that kinship automatically entails welfare provision, the idea that family ties have and have had deeper meaning for southern Europeans has proved hard to shake.⁹ Indeed, for Catalonia, the area under study here, there is a long tradition of stressing the importance of the stem family in terms of social cohesion, the welfare of family members and, *pace de Vries*, the economic dynamism of the region relative to the rest of Spain.¹⁰ However, this view of the stem family derives from a rural elite of substantial peasant families. It is less clear that it held the same significance among urban families and, indeed, the poor.¹¹ It is not that kinship networks were not important to the poor, but that there were limits to how far family support could go. There must always have been some role for the 'collectivity'. Moreover, as some have pointed out, family and welfare were not either/or options.¹² Rather than seeing institutional care as a negation of family ties, expressed most starkly in the notion of 'abandonment', use of the workhouse could be the best means by which families could meet a duty of care to dependents.¹³

In this article we use the records of one welfare institution, the Barcelona workhouse (*Misericòrdia* or *Hospicio*) over the period 1762-1805, first, to establish the characteristics of those who sought poor relief in terms of origin, age, marital status and gender, and second, to examine the nature of family ties among the poor and how the use made of the workhouse varied according to age and gender. Our work thus contributes to a growing literature that seeks to provide a more nuanced view of the southern European family and to investigate the relatively neglected area of poor relief provision in southern Europe, particularly Spain. In addition, it adds to the literature on the 'survival strategies' of the poor, though we recognise that 'strategy' is a problematic term to apply to the poor, both in terms of the degree of control and ability to plan for the longer term that it may imply, and in terms of the potential for conflict within households.¹⁴ Decisions to enter the Barcelona workhouse were not necessarily made at the household level.

II

The period under study was one of rapid economic change in both Barcelona and Catalonia as industrialisation took off with the advent of cotton, in tandem with the expansion of commercial viticulture prompted by overseas demand for wine and spirits.¹⁵ Rapid population growth and brief periods of economic prosperity were increasingly interrupted in the final decades of the eighteenth century by harvest failures, war and economic blockade, all of which caused rising prices and considerable social unrest.¹⁶ 1789 saw food riots in Barcelona and other towns.¹⁷ The authorities responded with a combination of repression and charity: rounding up vagrants on a periodic basis and imprisoning and executing rioters, but also setting up a charity committee, the *Junta de Caritat*, which ran soup kitchens and disbursed outdoor relief in response to the crises of 1763-4, 1789 and 1799-1802.¹⁸

⁸ Mandler, 'Poverty and charity', pp. 2-6.

⁹ For a discussion and challenge, see Horden, 'Household care and informal networks'.

¹⁰ Barrera, *Casa*.

¹¹ Lynch, *Individuals, families and communities*, pp. 58-67.

¹² Horden and Smith, 'Introduction'; Cavallo, 'Family obligations'; Zucca Micheletto, 'Family solidarity', Groppi, 'Assistenza'.

¹³ Boulton and Schwarz, 'Comforts'; Boulton, 'Extreme necessity'; Levene, 'Children'

¹⁴ Fontaine and Schlumbohm, 'Household strategies'; Boulton, 'Extreme necessity'; Kok, 'Challenge of strategy'; Engelen, 'Labour strategies'; Viazzo and Lynch, 'Anthropology'.

¹⁵ Vilar, *Catalogne*; Thomson, *Distinctive industrialization*; Valls Junyent, *Catalunya atlàntica*.

¹⁶ Delgado, 'El impacto'; Vilar, *Catalogne*, vol. II, pp. 104-9, 384-418.

¹⁷ Castells, 'Els rebomboris'; Renom, *Conflictes socials*, pp. 108-22.

¹⁸ Vilar *Catalogne*, vol. II, pp. 104-5; Simon Tarrés, 'Crisi de subsistències de 1763-4'; Garcia Domènech, 'Junta d' Auxilis'; Delgado, 'El impacto', pp. 134-9.

Outdoor relief existed alongside various forms of indoor relief. Perhaps the most important poor relief institution in the city was the *Misericòrdia*.¹⁹ The *Misericòrdia* was founded in 1584 with the aim of taking in all those in need or who were caught begging, without distinction of age or sex, and setting them to work. Those who were too sick and infirm to work were to be cared for in the *Hospital de Santa Creu*, founded in 1401. In 1771 a commission was set up under the auspices of the bishop of Barcelona, Josep Climent and five civic authorities to oversee the establishment of a new workhouse or *Hospicio*. The *hospicios* were part of a reforming drive by the Bourbon government aimed at the centralisation under state control of various aspects of governance, but also at the repression of social unrest, particularly after the French Revolution. They were intended as large-scale workhouses, to be built in major cities, with the aim above all of suppressing vagrancy, but also of taking in the poor of the surrounding area. In places where such institutions already existed, the main impact was a change in funding, in that the *hospicios* received a significant subsidy from the Crown. In the case of Barcelona, the end result was not to replace the *Misericòrdia*, but to increase its capacity and to change the name in 1775 to that of *Real Casa y Hospicio de Barcelona* (Royal House and Workhouse of Barcelona), to reflect, as elsewhere, the change in finances following the granting of a royal subsidy. The main significance of the change for our purposes is that the extension in the capacity of the workhouse was achieved by the acquisition in 1772 of a separate site in the Carrer Montalegre. The new site was used to house male inmates, while females remained on the old site in Carrer Elisabets, which continued to be referred to as the *Misericòrdia*.²⁰ A further change took place in 1803, with the establishment of another new workhouse, the *Casa de Caritat*, designed to take in still greater numbers than previously, but with a new focus on adults and the able-bodied poor. The *Misericòrdia* at this point took on a new role as an institution for poor girls under the age of 12.

One implication of these changes of name and location has been the different survival of the source material. All the records for females prior to 1803 or so (there is some overlap for 1803-5) are held in the archives of the *Misericòrdia*. The records of the *Casa de Caritat* from 1803 are held in a different archive, that of the *Diputació* (provincial government) of Barcelona. Until recently, no records pertaining to males prior to 1803 appeared to have survived. A single entry register has since come to light in the archives of the *Casa de Caritat*, covering those men and boys who entered the *Hospicio* between 1780 and 1803.²¹ This register forms the object of the present study. The records pertaining to males are set against those for females used in a previous study by Montserrat Carbonell, covering a longer time span of 1762-1805.²² It must be stressed from the outset that the volume of material that survives for the female section is huge compared to the single register for the male section. Aside from the female entry registers, which constitute the main source of Carbonell's work, the archives of the *Misericòrdia* include information relating to the financing and the everyday life of the institution, as well as, crucially, some petitions for entry into and exit from the workhouse. This last source allows us to say far more about the precise family circumstances of some females than can be said for males. For males, the only entry petitions to have survived are for boys who entered the institution along with mothers or sisters and whose details were kept by the *Misericòrdia*.

The registers contain roughly the same information for males and females, though the consistency with which all variables are recorded varies between the two datasets and over time. We have the date of entry, name and surname, age, marital status, names of parents and, where applicable, spouses, place of origin, occupation either of the man himself or, for the women, more usually the occupation of father or husband. We have some indication in the registers of why the individual in question

¹⁹ González Sugranyes, *Mendicidad y beneficencia*, pp. 99-122; Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, pp. 65-79.

²⁰ In this article, the name *Misericòrdia* will be used to refer to the female workhouse, *Hospicio* to refer to the male, though the first term was also used more specifically to refer to the department within the female workhouse for girls, who were kept apart from older women.

²¹ Arxiu General de la Diputació de Barcelona (henceforth AGDB), CC, 29.

²² Carbonell, 'Pobresa'; Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, pp. 55-168. We use Carbonell's original database compiled from two entry registers in Arxiu Històric de la Casa de Misericòrdia de Barcelona (henceforth AHCMB), ARM3, P5, Vol. 6, *Entradas y salidas del año 1769* and Vol. 7, *Llibre de Donas de entradas y eixidas de Real Ospici de la present ciutat de Barna comensant en lo any 1790*.

entered the workhouse, in the form of brief notes such as ‘caught begging’, ‘sent by parish’, and who brought them, whether family or the authorities. We also have some information about why they left, for example, placed in domestic service or apprenticeships, or reclaimed by family. The registers record all information regarding names, age, sex, origin and reasons for first entry on the left-hand or verso page, and then across the right-hand or recto page there are brief notes on when and why the individual in question exited the workhouse but also notes for re-entries and exits. 17% of the males and 14% of the females entered the workhouse more than once.

In theory, the workhouse was supposed to take in all able-bodied paupers regardless of age or sex, while foundlings and those who were ill or mad, were taken in by the *Hospital de Santa Creu*. In practice, the dividing lines were not always clear: the workhouse in 1796 and 1797 had a group of inmates described as ‘excused from work because of their chronic ills’.²³ There were also other institutions in Barcelona that shared some of the same functions of the *hospicio*, though these were much smaller and specialised in function: the *Casa de Reclusió* or *Galera*, a female prison, with 111 inmates in 1787; the *Casa del Retir*, for penitent prostitutes, with 24 inmates and the *Casa dels Infants Orfes*, for orphaned children, with just 24 orphans. That same year, the *Hospital de Santa Creu* had 1,755 patients, including foundlings out to nurse, and the *Misericòrdia* and *Hospicio* had 1,341 inmates between them, making these the principal welfare institutions in a city of some 124,000 inhabitants. There were links between them and transfers back and forth. Very few individuals died in either the *Misericòrdia* or the *Hospicio*, being transferred to the *Hospital de Santa Creu* instead, but their deaths are still recorded in the registers, suggesting that the workhouses attempted to keep tabs on those who left. There were also transfers, in both directions, between the workhouse and the various prisons of Barcelona. The workhouse thus combined relief for the poor with repression of the poor, in a similar fashion to that described by Sandra Cavallo for the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin.²⁴ As in Turin, the last decades of the eighteenth century seem to have marked a high point in the repressive nature of the institution. In earlier and later periods, the regime seems to have been more relaxed. This role of disciplining as well as relieving the poor needs to be borne in mind later when the question of family ‘strategies’ is discussed. Not all who entered the workhouse did so voluntarily.

III

[Figure 1 here]

The two datasets contain information on 6176 females who entered the workhouse between 1762 and 1805 and 4063 males who entered between 1780 and 1803. Figure 1 shows the numbers entering each year. The annual totals combine those entering for the first time with subsequent re-entries. There is a certain degree of truncation bias for the early years in both series, since re-entries by males and females who entered for the first time before the initial date of the series are not captured. Beyond that, however, the trends show peaks in the crisis year of 1789 and around 1793-4, when prices were also high again.²⁵ Interestingly, however, the crisis of 1799-1802 saw a dip in numbers entering. These are also the years when the *Junta de Caritat* was co-ordinating outdoor relief in the form of a soup kitchen. Over 4 million rations were distributed between 17th March 1799 and 4th April 1802.²⁶ It may be that additional relief allowed the poor to remain outside the workhouse to a greater extent than otherwise. More likely, however, is that the workhouse was unable to admit as many poor as usual, forcing the authorities to step in with provision of outdoor relief.²⁷ The institution’s finances were in a parlous state by the end of the eighteenth century, the result of the economic crisis, so much so that it

²³ AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C3, ‘Estats de les persones i cabdals, 1773-1798’, reports for 1796 and 1797.

²⁴ Cavallo, ‘Conceptions of poverty’.

²⁵ Vilar, *Catalogne*, vol. II, pp. 387-90, 410-18

²⁶ Accounts are in *Diario de Barcelona*, 6th November 1802. See also Delgado, ‘El impacto’, p. 138.

²⁷ Fairchild suggests admissions to the *Charité* in Aix-en-Provence were determined by the institution’s finances, since she finds no correlation with prices. Fairchild, *Poverty and charity*, pp. 96-8.

made an urgent appeal for donations in August 1800, claiming to have funds left for only three days.²⁸ There is no indication, however, that turnover was more rapid over time or in crisis years.

[Table 1 here]

Although the ordinances stressed that no distinctions were to be drawn in terms of age or sex, two groups were particular targets for the *hospicios*, with different motives on the part of reformers: young women in need of protection and vagrants.²⁹ There were large-scale round-ups of the poor in 1772, with the opening of the new *hospicio* on Carrer Montalegre, in 1775, and in 1789.³⁰ In 1775, four *mossos* or police officers were created with the specific job of rounding up beggars across the diocese of Barcelona.³¹ The figures for 1772 in Table 1 reflect the situation before the round-up of that year and the opening of the new *Hospicio*. The effect of the round-up is clear, with far more males entering than females: 527 and 282 respectively.³² While more males left, thus keeping females in the majority, the female share from 1773 onwards remained lower than it had been prior to the round-up.

[Figures 2a and b around here]

In terms of the numbers entering annually, at least from 1780 males entered in greater numbers than females, as Figure 1 shows. However, stays by males were far shorter than stays by females, as Figures 2a and 2b show, thus explaining why females outnumbered males at the dates shown in Table 1. To avoid the distortion of having a longer time span for female stays, which would allow longer stays to be over-represented compared for males, only those stays occurring after 1780 are included. Only first stays are compared, as including subsequent stays would bias the sample towards shorter stays. As Figures 2a and 2b show, males overwhelmingly stayed for under a year, even in the youngest age groups. Females stayed for longer at all ages, but with marked differences between the lengths of stays of girls and women. These differences are described further below. Comparable figures for London workhouses show different patterns: in Westminster, women stayed longer than men, but the elderly stayed longer than the young, whereas in St Marylebone, children under 10 stayed longer than other age groups.³³

[Figures 3 and 4 here]

Figures 3 and 4 show trends over time for males and females respectively depending on place of origin, whether from Barcelona or not. Place of origin refers to the phrase *natural de*, usually meaning birthplace. For both sexes, 29% of the sample were from Barcelona, but with considerable fluctuations from year to year. Nonetheless, it is clear that the overall downwards trend in entries was driven mainly by a decline in those coming from outside Barcelona. Why this should be is unclear. The 1790s saw many years in which economic blockade and rising prices led to factory closures in Barcelona, but the crisis was by no means confined to the city, and so the demand for poor relief was not necessarily higher in Barcelona than elsewhere. More likely is that financial pressure led the workhouse to be chary of admitting outsiders. There is no evidence of an explicit policy change, but it may be that round-ups of vagrants across the region were carried out with less enthusiasm than before, or perhaps that male vagrants were forcibly conscripted into the army or navy. A royal decree in April 1794 ordered that 2500 men be recruited across Catalonia from amongst those considered to be

²⁸ *Diario de Barcelona*, 25th August 1800.

²⁹ Climent, *Noticia*; Arxiu Històric de Girona, Fons Hospici, 2145, letter of Bishop Tomás de Lorenzana, dated 12 December 1780.

³⁰ For similar crackdowns on begging elsewhere, see Lis and Soly, 'Total institutions', pp. 43-4.

³¹ Biblioteca de Catalunya (henceforth BC), Follets Bonsoms, 4988 and 7245; AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C1, 'Murrís, vagos i pobres, 1775-6'.

³² AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C3, *Estats de persones i cabdals, 1773-1798*, 'Estado de la gente existente en la casa hospicio de Misericòrdia de Barcelona en 1 de julio de 1773'; Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, Table 1 on p. 195. The round-up lasted from 3rd November 1772 until 1st July 1773. The figures in Table 1 for those years are the totals of males and females present on those two dates.

³³ Boulton and Schwarz, 'Comforts', p. 227; Levene, 'Children', pp. 49-50.

‘idle’.³⁴ A decree of 15th April 1799 ordered all immigrants who were not gainfully employed to leave Barcelona under pain of a prison sentence, though those in need of relief were supposedly exempt.³⁵ In earlier years, the workhouse admissions do suggest to some extent that economic crises saw a surge of immigrants into the city from the countryside, given clear peaks in 1763 for females, and 1789 for both sexes, but by the 1790s this effect was muted. Despite contemporary comments that the city was full of outsiders, including refugees driven south by the French invasion of 1793-4, a greater presence of outsiders in the city did not translate into a greater presence in the workhouse.³⁶

[Figures 5 and 6]

Short-term crises were not the only driving force behind migration. Although, as will be discussed below, place of origin tells us nothing about the timing of migration, the locations from which the workhouse population was drawn suggest a role for the Barcelona labour market in determining the movements of many inmates. The bulk of migrants came from within Catalonia. Just 6.9% came from elsewhere in Spain, mostly from the neighbouring regions of Aragon and Valencia, and 4.7% came from abroad, mostly from France. Figures 5 and 6 show the districts or *comarques* within Catalonia from which men and women respectively came, excluding those from Barcelona. Men were more likely to have migrated over longer distances and to have come from outside Catalonia, with 8.5% coming from elsewhere in Spain and 7.8% from abroad, compared with 4.1% and 2% respectively for women. For both men and women, the highest proportions were drawn from the central districts, particularly the Bages and Osona districts and along the coast from the Maresme. The central districts that contributed high numbers to the workhouse were part of a proto-industrial zone, originally focused on the woollen industry but rapidly going over to cotton during this period.³⁷ The putting-out networks of the woollen industry were quickly taken over by cotton spinning for the Barcelona mills and local enterprises.³⁸ The migration patterns shown here match in terms of geography and occupations those found by Natalia Mora-Sitja in an analysis of dispensations from marriage banns for the years 1770, 1800 and 1830.³⁹ The information on occupations for males in the workhouse sample is too limited to confirm this labour market effect, but the occupations recorded for females, that is, those of fathers or husbands, show a high proportion of textile workers, 20% of recorded occupations overall, above that of other sectors, and rising in importance over the period to account for 26% of known occupations during the years 1792-1805.⁴⁰ Other important sectors were agriculture and construction, the latter reflecting the physical expansion of the city during these years. Arranz and Grau found similar patterns in place of origin for apprentices in the building trades for the years 1761-70.⁴¹ It is thus likely that the workhouse reflects a pattern of migration into Barcelona when demand for labour was high, but also provided support to this workforce during downturns and factory closures. It is no accident that the committees in charge of organising poor relief during the crises of 1763-4 and 1799-1802 included several cotton manufacturers, some of whom were later involved in the administration of the *Casa de Caritat*.⁴² However, as will be discussed below, the workhouse did not simply take in factory workers who were temporarily unemployed, but also played an active role in training young men and women, particularly the latter, for the labour market.

[Table 2 here]

The population of the workhouse was extremely young. Table 2 shows the age profiles for the men and the women of the workhouse, compared with the age distribution for the population of Catalonia

³⁴ Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. II, p. 168.

³⁵ *Diario de Barcelona*, 15th April 1799; Delgado, ‘El impacto’, pp. 136-7.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 270.

³⁷ Torras, ‘Especialización’.

³⁸ Okuno, ‘Entre la llana i el cotó’; Garcia Balaña, *Fabricació*, pp. 71-89; Marfany, *Land*, pp. 77-8, 82-4.

³⁹ Mora-Sitja, ‘Labour supply’, pp. 90-99.

⁴⁰ Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, pp. 136-46, 197-200. Occupations were given for 1,446 women but only 79 men.

⁴¹ Arranz and Grau, ‘Inmigración’, pp. 73-7.

⁴² BC, Fons Erasme de Gònima, 67/6, ‘Casa de Caritat’; AGDB, CC VII 767; Simon Tarrés, ‘Crisi de 1763-1764’, pp. 200-1; Vilar, *Catalogne*, vol. II, p. 104; Delgado, ‘El impacto’, p. 135.

as a whole, according to the census of 1787. As just shown, Catalonia was the main ‘drawing area’ for the workhouse. Again, to keep the samples comparable, only those women who entered after 1780 are included, though the age profile does not appear to have shifted over time for either men or women. The age categories are those of the census. In addition, an estimate of the likelihood that different groups might be in the workhouse is provided by dividing the number of males or females in given age groups by the relevant group within the population as a whole. What jumps out is the dominance of the 7-15 age group for both sexes. Relative to the age profile of the Catalan population as a whole, this group is overrepresented within the workhouse, though, somewhat surprisingly given the deliberate targeting of young women, adolescent boys seem to have had a greater likelihood of entering the workhouse. It may be that families held on to girls for longer, while boys were perhaps more likely to be fending for themselves. The under-representation of adults aged 15-50 is not surprising. The under-representation of younger children can be explained in part by the *Hospital de Santa Creu*, which took in foundlings and, in the case of boys, the likelihood that these were left with their mothers in the women’s quarters until old enough to be transferred to the men’s department, but with such transfers not always being recorded.⁴³ The predominance of younger ages matches to an extent what Cavallo has described for the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin in the 1750s, though there those over 60 also stand out, but is higher than the figures for London workhouses, where children under 16 made up between 20 and 45% of inmates and for the Hospital General in Grenoble.⁴⁴ The predominance of the 7-15 age group in the *Misericòrdia* and *Hospicio* speaks to the role played by the workhouse in facilitating entry into the labour market, discussed below.

Another group that is overrepresented compared with the general population, however, is men over 50. Here, the contrast between the sexes comes as something of a shock. Older women were not overrepresented in the workhouse compared with the general population, but the 21% of men in this age group were, and men over 40 seem to have been more likely than women to end up in the workhouse. We might expect the reverse to be true, given the wealth of historical evidence for the vulnerability of elderly women in the past. In the absence of surviving entry petitions for men, explaining the greater presence of men over fifty is difficult. Of the 590 men in question, however, 86% were from outside Barcelona originally, suggesting that migration may have been a factor. Men were perhaps more likely than women to end up some distance from kin and place of birth, a question we return to below. It may also be that a sense of family obligation was stronger where women were concerned, or that elderly women were still of use within the household, as providers of childcare and other services.⁴⁵

Table 3 shows marital status, again compared with the Catalan population in 1787. Among both males and females, single people dominated and were overrepresented compared with the Catalan population overall in 1787. This is unsurprising given the youthful age profile of the workhouse. Both widows and widowers were also overrepresented in the workhouse relative to the general population. For women, this is hardly surprising, given the vulnerability to poverty which characterised widows across European societies. More surprising perhaps for men, is that widowers were overrepresented to a greater degree than widows.

[Table 3 here]

Among the elderly, however, the vulnerability of widows is clear. Table 4 shows marital status for those aged 50 or over on entry to the workhouse. Two-thirds of women in this age group were widowed, compared with just over a third of men, suggesting that for women, it was not age *per se* that determined entry into the workhouse so much as being elderly and without a partner. For men, the

⁴³ For example, Josep Mir, aged 5, entered the *Misericòrdia* with his mother and sisters on 22nd July 1790, but there is no record of either his subsequent transfer or departure. By contrast, 80 boys are recorded in the register of the *Hospicio* as having been transferred from the *Misericòrdia*.

⁴⁴ Cavallo, ‘Conceptions of poverty’, Table 6.4 on p. 162; Levene, ‘Children’, p.44 and n.21; Boulton and Schwarz, ‘Comforts’, p. 227; Norberg, *Rich and poor*, pp. 177-8.

⁴⁵ Boulton and Schwarz, ‘Comforts’, pp. 231-2.

loss of a spouse seems to have mattered far less than old age. Half of the men over 50 were married on entry to the workhouse, though, as will be seen below, few actually entered with their wives, suggesting a significant loosening of family ties.

[Table 4 here]

IV

Having established the characteristics of the workhouse population, the larger question of the strength of family ties still remains. This question can be assessed in more depth from the information on reasons for entry and exit as given in the registers and for some females, from the petitions that accompanied their entry or exit. The reasons for entry are shown in Table 5 by age and sex, while Table 6 shows length of stay according to sex and reason for entry. Both tables include first entries only, as reasons for entry are rarely given on subsequent entries, probably because of lack of space in which to write detailed information. In Table 6, those who died have been excluded, to avoid including stays that were shorter regardless of motive for entry. Since length of stay did not change over time, female entries are for the entire period in Table 6. Reasons for entry or, at least, recording practices do appear to have changed slightly over time, however, so female entries are split before and after 1780 in Table 5. A huge weakness is the extent to which information is either missing or vague for males and females. The unknown category includes those for whom the register was blank and those for whom the entry read simply along the lines of *vino* (he came) or *admitido* (he was admitted). As can be seen, this category accounts for 74% of male entries overall, and two-thirds of even the youngest age group. For women, this category diminishes in importance over time, but still accounts for over half of female entries after 1780. Where reasons for entry are given, there are some striking differences between males and females, which are more likely to reflect differences in recording practices than in reality. ‘Orphans and abandoned’ include those with one or both parents dead, those abandoned by spouses or parents, those with parents or spouses in prison or hospital and a tiny number of lost children. Only fifteen boys are described as ‘orphans’ or abandoned, compared to 665 women and girls between 1780-1803. As will be seen shortly, females were more likely to be returned to families and thus there may have been a greater concern from the start to establish their family circumstances, though this should not be exaggerated given the high proportion of women without information of this kind. ‘Discipline’ includes those sent from prison, caught smuggling, sent ‘for correction’ and one case of syphilis. ‘Without means’ includes all those described simply in vague terms indicating poverty, the most common by far being *desamparado/a* (without means). Transfers are from other institutions, usually the hospital. Why so many more males were described as ill or disabled is a mystery: it may reflect a lack of capacity in the male wards at the *Hospital de Santa Creu*. ‘Other’ for men is reasons that did not fit into other categories. Many of these were soldiers sent by their regiments, but whether because they were ill, or needed discipline, is not stated.

[Tables 5 and 6 here]

One divide in Tables 5 and 6 is between those who were sent to the workhouse as a disciplinary measure, or for begging, and those who were admitted for relief. The two categories of inmates were segregated in the *Misericòrdia* and presumably also in the *Hospicio*, with those who had been admitted for disciplinary reasons treated more harshly in terms of diet and regime. Table 5 shows that it was rare for women to be sent to the workhouse for disciplinary reasons except for begging, with only 18 women sent for discipline between 1780-1803 compared with 133 men. Table 6 suggests that women admitted for such reasons stayed for shorter lengths of time than other women. Fewer males admitted for disciplinary reasons stayed over a year than in any other category except the miscellaneous ‘other’ category, but the preponderance overall of shorter stays for males means the difference is far less marked than for women. For both sexes, begging, and for men and boys, discipline, were associated with repeat stays. Adding these in brings the totals for male beggars up from 179 to 206, female beggars up from 505 to 632 (both periods combined) and men and boys

admitted for discipline up from 89 to 133. Of these 133, 85 were boys between 10 and 19 years of age. Mothers often claimed to be struggling with adolescent boys in the absence of fathers. Francisca Gener, a widow seeking entry for her only son, complained of his disobedience, mistreatment of her and that he had run away from home several times, behaving worse on each return.⁴⁶ Lis and Soly have described similar practices in Antwerp as a 'strategy' by parents to force adolescent sons to contribute to the household economy by using incarceration as a punishment.⁴⁷ If nothing else, it would relieve the household temporarily of one mouth to feed.

However, when the registers are supplemented with surviving petitions, it becomes clear that for many females, particularly married women, disciplinary reasons also lay behind their entry into the *Misericòrdia*. Rosa Ramon Surroca was sent to the *Misericòrdia* on 5th July 1799. Her husband requested her admission because of her 'disorderly behaviour'.⁴⁸ Narcisa Bonaplata Sala was admitted in June 1799, after her two brothers-in-law alleged she was often drunk and violent towards her blind husband.⁴⁹ Anna Autanell was admitted with her two daughters in June 1781 at the request of her parents and parish priest. She had been abandoned by her husband with their daughters, and had become pregnant by someone else. She had been admitted to hospital at the instigation of her parents and other relatives to have her baby. Since her return to her village, however, she had 'continued in her immoral behaviour', causing 'scandal' and setting a 'bad example' to her daughters.⁵⁰ The *Misericòrdia* thus substituted for divorce among the poor, or allowed poor families to shed troublesome members, at least temporarily.

The figures for begging also raise questions about family ties. Despite the higher presence of men in the workhouse in years when beggars were being targeted by the authorities, between 1780 and 1803 among first entries, female beggars outnumbered male by a ratio of 1.4:1 in terms of absolute numbers, and as a percentage of reasons for entry in Table 5.⁵¹ This finding seems to contradict the suggestion above that families might feel a stronger sense of obligation towards women than towards men, reflected in the greater presence of older men in the workhouse. Both could be true, however: families may have made a greater effort to keep elderly female relatives at home than elderly men, but when family support was inadequate, women may have had fewer resources with which to keep themselves off the streets. It may be, however, that many of the men described as 'sent for discipline' had in fact been caught begging or, as suggested above, that in some years beggars were forcibly conscripted. Similarly, the decline over time in percentage terms of women admitted for begging, combined with a rise in those described as 'without means' points to two possibilities. One is that increasingly women either came or were brought directly to the workhouse who might previously have tried begging first. The second is that the authorities were perhaps exercising compassion and categorising women as 'without means' in order to allow them to stay longer, though we lack knowledge of any actual directives to the effect that beggars were to be discharged sooner than other women. Unfortunately, 209 of 251 female beggars after 1780 had no age recorded, so it is impossible to know if older women continued to be those with the highest percentages admitted for begging, as was the case before 1780.

The marital status of female beggars points to a certain extent to a weakening of family ties: 42% were widowed, compared with 18% of the overall population of the *Misericòrdia* and with 23-39% of female beggars in London. Moreover, the proportion of women caught begging who were reclaimed by family members (18%) was much lower than that for all women (see Table 7 below). However, on closer examination, the question becomes more complex. First, 30% of the women caught begging were married, slightly above the proportion single (28%). In some cases, they were begging because

⁴⁶ AHCMB, AF9, C3, Lligall 3, expedient 8, undated.

⁴⁷ Lis and Soly, 'Total institutions', pp. 44-50.

⁴⁸ AHCMB, ARM5, P3, C4, expedient 65.

⁴⁹ AHCMB, ARM5, P3, C4, expedient 56.

⁵⁰ AHCMB, ARM2, P5, C2, expedient 17.

⁵¹ Rogers, 'Policing the poor' has ratios of between 3:1 and 2:1 in London, whereas Norberg (*Rich and poor*, p. 221) shows that men were two-thirds of the inmates of the *Dépôt de Mendicité* in Grenoble by the 1780s.

their husbands were absent, in prison or in the hospital, but in other cases they were begging alongside their husbands or other family members. In other cases, where women were reclaimed by kin, there is the suspicion that women were begging to supplement family income. The petitions that accompanied requests for release often claim that the woman's arrest for begging was a mistake, but the circumstances are suspicious. According to her husband, Francisca Vidal was wrongly arrested for begging on the steps climbing up to the city wall, and he could swear that he had sufficient means with which to keep her.⁵² However, contemporary sources suggest the city wall was a popular place for beggars, since it was a favourite stroll for Barcelona residents.⁵³ Similarly, Teresa Quadras was arrested simply for being 'poorly dressed', according to her son, and Maria Rosa Izquierdo because 'a charitable person customarily gave her alms, but without [Maria Rosa] begging'.⁵⁴ These examples hint at the possibility that begging for some women was a means to contribute to a family economy of makeshifts, rather than a sign of abandonment.

Among those whose entry into the workhouse was not characterised in terms of punishment, the situation in terms of family ties was equally complex. In many cases, entry was also testament to how fragile ties of kinship could be among the poor. Particularly telling in this regard is the high proportion of individuals described as married, compared with the low proportion of married couples. We know from the *Misericòrdia* registers when women entered with other family members, but for the men, relationships are rarely stated and thus have to be deduced from shared surnames, places of origin and other information. Only for 24 of the 729 married men and 78 of the 703 married women could spouses be identified as present in the workhouse at the same time. While these figures are likely to be underestimates, since couples who entered apart are harder to detect in the sources than those who entered the same day, it is still clear that entry into the workhouse either entailed the break-up of a marriage or was a sign that the marriage had already broken down. In some cases, as we have seen, entry to the *Misericòrdia* was a means of disciplining 'wayward wives', or a form of divorce for the poor. Many of the married women came in having been abandoned by their husbands, as in the sad case of Anna Autanell above. As elsewhere, war was a frequent reason for abandonment.⁵⁵ Maria Termens, whose husband Joan was absent from home having deserted from the army, came voluntarily to the *Misericòrdia* in October 1783, since she was pregnant and without the means to support herself.⁵⁶ Occasionally, the registers reveal that husbands were in the *Hospital Santa Creu* or in prison. For the men, unfortunately, there is no way of knowing where a wife was unless she can be identified in the *Misericòrdia* records. 85% of married men and 83% of widowed men were from outside Barcelona, however, compared with 67% of single men. Combined with the finding above that older men were a significant group amongst those in the *Hospicio* from outside Barcelona, these figures suggest a pattern of migration by men, whether in search of work, alms or both, with wives and children left at home. In some cases, this will have constituted abandonment, in others temporary migration.

Indeed, one interpretation of the high presence in the workhouse of those born outside of Barcelona would be that the institution was catering to a migrant population that had lost ties to family and origins. Even if we assume, *a priori*, that urban immigrant households might have fewer kin ties on which to call, place of origin is a blunt tool in this instance. We have no means in most cases of distinguishing those who had been in Barcelona for some time before entering the workhouse, from those who were sent from elsewhere straight to the workhouse. Similarly, children born in Barcelona who entered the *Misericòrdia* or *Hospicio* could have parents born elsewhere and also lack kin networks. We can deduce from the information available in some cases that all these scenarios were to be found amongst the workhouse population. Josep Fontrodona entered in November 1790, aged 4, and from Barcelona, but with his father Antoni who was originally from Caldes de Montbui. Theirs was perhaps a case of a migrant family forced to have recourse to the workhouse once employment

⁵² AHCMB, AF9, C3, Lligall 3, expedient 9, letter dated 4th May 1795.

⁵³ Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. V, pp. 127, 143, 226, 267-9.

⁵⁴ Cited in Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ Bailey, *Unquiet lives*; Kent, 'Gone for a soldier'.

⁵⁶ AHCMB), ARM3, P5, Vol. 7, *Llibre d'entradas de donas*, fol. 270.

failed or another disaster struck. By contrast, Antoni Llobet Planas was sent to the *Hospicio* in May 1781, aged 12, by the parish priest and civil authorities of his home village of Baga, presumably because he was an orphan. There are numerous instances like this in the registers and among the entry petitions for women. Rural families were no less fragile than urban ones when poverty struck.

The discussion so far could be taken as simply reinforcing the image presented by much of the literature, in that poor relief in this instance was being used only when family ties were weak or non-existent. The opposition between family and welfare still remains. However, it is clear from many examples that the poor relief offered by the workhouse also enabled families to provide better for kin and to fulfil the duty of care that many recognised themselves as being under. Frequently, entry into the workhouse of dependents allowed households to survive difficult periods in the life-cycle or short-term economic crises. As such, the workhouse could be part of the survival strategies of poor households, as elsewhere in Europe, albeit a short-term measure rather than a long-term plan.⁵⁷ In particular, placing dependents in the workhouse freed up men and women to work. Marcos Codina, a widowed day labourer, placed his daughters aged 8 and 4 in the workhouse. He was described in the entry petition as ‘a poor labourer who one day has work, another day does not, because of which they are very poor and he is unable to keep his daughters. But what most troubles the petitioner is that if he is offered work outside the city he has to leave them alone’. Miquel Nieto, a shoemaker, requested admission for his elderly father since he was unable to take care of him and work at the same time, whereas if his father was in the *Hospicio*, Miquel could work and contribute to his father’s keep.⁵⁸

Beatrice Zucca Micheletto has recently highlighted the important role played by the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin in facilitating continued labour force participation for women with children.⁵⁹ The *Ospedale* did this in three ways: by contributing to the ‘economy of makeshifts’ with bread rations and other temporary aid; by placing infants with wet-nurses and by taking in older children for brief periods. The *Hospicio* and *Misericòrdia* fulfilled only the last of these three functions, the other two being taken up in the case of Barcelona by the *olla pública* (soup kitchen) and by the *Hospital de Santa Creu*. It is clear, though, that taking in children frequently allowed women to continue working. Mariangela Huguet, a widow, left a daughter in the *Misericòrdia* ‘because she works and cannot take care of her’. Magdalena Sintés requested entry for her son, aged 6, in order to work as a wet-nurse.⁶⁰ Maria Calvet requested admission for her daughter since she herself was working as a servant.⁶¹

Heads of households, male and female, thus frequently used the workhouse as part of an economy of makeshifts, placing dependents, especially children in the institution in times of crisis, and reclaiming them once circumstances were better.⁶² Maria Vidal, a widow, took her mother Isabel Marqués out of the workhouse in 1777 after three years: ‘since the petitioner now has the means to provide for her mother’.⁶³ Children, girls in particular, were often reclaimed once better able to contribute to the family economy. Rosa and Maria Cantilló were sent to the *Misericòrdia* in 1770 as orphans. In 1777, their brother requested that they be allowed to leave in order to live with their cousin Narcis March, to work as servants, but with the promise of a dowry in due course.⁶⁴ Francisca Miró was reclaimed by an uncle in 1785, after 15 years in the workhouse, in part to help her aunt at home following the marriage of her aunt and uncle’s only daughter.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Fontaine and Schlumbohm, ‘Household strategies’; Boulton, ‘Extreme necessity’; Hitchcock, ‘Unlawfully begotten’; Lis and Soly, ‘Total institutions’.

⁵⁸ AHCMB, AF18, P2, C1, ‘Memoriales presentados para la admisión de pobres’, undated, but some time between 1798 and 1800.

⁵⁹ Zucca Micheletto, *Travail et propriété des femmes*, pp. 194-218.

⁶⁰ AF18, P2, C1, ‘Memoriales presentados para la admisión de pobres’, undated, but some time between 1798 and 1800.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² For similar strategies in Turin, see Zucca Micheletto, ‘Family solidarity’, pp. 522-7.

⁶³ Carbonell, *Sobreviure*, p. 159.

⁶⁴ AHCMB, ARM2, P3, C5. Expedient 20.

⁶⁵ AHCMB, ARM2, P3, C5, Expedient 14.

Reclamation, however, was far more common for females. Table 7 shows, where recorded, the eventual mode of exit for males and females by age at entry, excluding the 19% of men and 21% of women who died. Again, only first exits are included, as information was usually lacking from subsequent stays. Unfortunately, large numbers of exits are recorded simply along the lines of 'left with permission of the workhouse authorities', shown in Table 7 as 'discharged, no details'. However, fewer exits than entries were left entirely blank in this regard. Only stays where individuals were known to have exited, that is, because a date of exit or a subsequent re-entry, were included. Entry into the labour market refers to domestic service, apprenticeships, the army and navy. 'Transferred elsewhere' includes those sent to the hospital, but excluding those who died there, or another institution.

[Table 7 here]

The gender differences here are stark. Men and boys were overwhelmingly more likely simply to be discharged. The workhouse authorities may have been more reluctant to allow females to leave without a family to whom they could be entrusted. Males were also more likely to escape, presumably because it was easier for them to do so. The declining proportion of women escaping probably reflects stricter controls imposed upon women at the recommendation of bishop Climent. The most important finding, however, is that only in 6.3% of cases were males reclaimed by a family member, usually a parent, compared with 45.8% and 57.1% of reclamation of females in the two sub-periods. As described above, females were often reclaimed in order to contribute to the household economy, to substitute in effect for domestic servants. However, we would expect the earning capacity of boys in the urban economy of Barcelona to be equal to that of girls, or certainly not so much lower as to explain such a discrepancy. In the absence of petitions soliciting the removal of boys from the workhouse, we can only speculate that ties of family loyalty seem to have carried more weight where girls were concerned.

For the largest group of inmates and those who stayed for longest, children and adolescents, entry into the workhouse was not just a short-term response to crisis, but may also have been a long-term strategy aimed at improving life chances. The workhouse offered a powerful incentive to families to place children and adolescents there, namely, preparation for entering the labour market. As such, the institution constituted what Clare Haru Crowston has termed with reference to the *Trinité* hospital in Paris, an 'alternative apprenticeship', that is, a route into the labour market that allowed the poor to bypass traditional guild structures or at least some of their requirements.⁶⁶ Overall, 18% of boys aged under 20 left for apprenticeships, domestic service or the army or navy, primarily the first of these, and 11% of girls under 20 left to go into domestic service. From 1772, the *Misericòrdia* embraced a new role of training domestic servants, teaching a hierarchy of skills including cooking and hairdressing.⁶⁷ Prior to that, the workhouse had been reluctant to place women in domestic service. Under new proposals by bishop Climent, women would be placed with suitably vetted households, but under regular supervision by the workhouse, which took them back in if need be. As Climent pointed out, simply by virtue of being adequately dressed, women from the *Misericòrdia* were well-placed to find work as domestic servants. The bishop also stressed that girls from the *Misericòrdia* were used to a life of discipline. Respectable households wanting maidservants who were accustomed to being indoors, 'who were well trained and of an honest disposition' should thus apply to the *Misericòrdia*.⁶⁸ Households had to prove their respectability: in the margins of the letters written to request servants are notes from parish priests or others of good standing testifying to the honest reputation of the would-be employers. Marianna Llobera was thus described by her parish priest as 'a woman to whom the servant she requests could be safely entrusted'.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Haru Crowston, 'L'apprentissage hors des corporations', pp. 409-41.

⁶⁷ Climent, *Noticia*, pp. 5-14.

⁶⁸ AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C3, 'Criadas que han salido en 1777', letter of Juan Janer, dated 24th January 1777, requesting a maidservant from the *Misericòrdia*.

⁶⁹ Ibid, letter dated 15th February 1777.

The workhouse was also involved in various forms of textile manufacturing.⁷⁰ In 1776, there were two workshops dedicated to woollen manufactures, one with 48 spinning wheels, the other with 50, and one dedicated to cotton. In 1768, the *Misericòrdia* had contracted a master clothier, Domingo Artés, to teach carding and spinning to the women and boys, and in 1784, at the instigation of the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce (*Junta de Comerç*), sent girls to a newly established school for spinning in order to learn the so-called Piedmontese method of spinning. Undoubtedly the workhouse made use of skills that many inmates already had, given that 20% of women were the wives, widows or daughters of men in the textile sector and that, as has been shown, many were coming from proto-industrial areas. It was, though, also equipping women to participate in a market where female labour was in demand for much of the period, so much so that women occasionally cited training as a motive for entry into the workhouse. Maria Torell, herself working as a domestic servant, requested that her 14 year-old daughter be taken in by the workhouse in order 'to learn sewing and stocking-knitting'.⁷¹ By the end of the eighteenth century, the workhouse was sending women not just into domestic service but also into the textile factories. In June 1795, two women were sent out to learn spinning and nine to work in a factory, though the fact that a chaperone accompanied them suggests they returned to the workhouse at night.⁷² In particular, the workhouse took a leading role in testing new technology. In 1778, there were proposals to build a new spinning wheel and to set up looms for weaving cotton in the workhouse. In 1790, the workhouse tested a new machine for spinning wool, and in 1793 one for spinning linen, hemp, silk, wool and cotton. A document of July 1795 refers to Teresa Botés, who 'having learned to spin with a machine, initiated work on the first machine that was set up in the *Misericòrdia* on the 11th of this month'.⁷³

Far less is known about training for boys. According to one contemporary, the *Reial Audiència*, the supreme authority in Catalonia, decreed in 1787 that all boys be taught reading, writing and arithmetic, though it is not clear from the reference whether this was an entirely new venture or simply the adoption of new methods.⁷⁴ Apprentices were placed across a range of occupations. The advantage offered by the workhouse in this regard was that boys from both the *Hospicio* and the *Hospital de Santa Creu* were exempt from paying premiums, a longstanding privilege the institutions fought hard to preserve in the face of guild opposition.⁷⁵ Moreover, the *Hospicio* had its own employment to offer. The institution had its own market garden, cultivated in part by the inmates, but also involving outside labour, as a series of letters from around 1770 from individuals requesting the job of gardener testify. In more than one instance, the petitioners strengthened their claim by pointing out that they had previously worked in the garden during their stay in the *Hospicio* or were married to a woman who had been in the *Misericòrdia*.⁷⁶ To give just one example, Joan Fons, alias Malgrat, had been twenty years in the *Hospicio*, six of which he had spent working in the garden, before serving an apprenticeship with a market gardener. If given the job, he offered to marry a girl from the *Misericòrdia*.

In addition to smoothing entry into the labour market, the workhouse also attempted to smooth entry into the marriage market. Girls were eligible to enter three lotteries which paid out dowries every year from charitable funds endowed for that purpose, and also benefitted from one-off lotteries, such as in 1799, when the new bishop, Pedro Díaz Valdés, sought to mark his investiture by paying dowries of

⁷⁰ For this section, see Alonso and Rodríguez, 'Beneficència il.lustrada'.

⁷¹ AHCMB, AF18, P2, C1, 'Memoriales presentados para la admisión de pobres'.

⁷² ARM4, P2, C1, 'Muchachas que se han vestido por orden del Señor Obispo Junio 1795'.

⁷³ ARM4, P2, C1, 'Muchachas que se han vestido por orden del Señor Obispo Junio 1795'.

⁷⁴ Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. I, pp. 169-70; AHCMB, ARM2, P1, C2, 'Estatutos para el Gobierno de la Escuela del Hospicio'.

⁷⁵ For disputes surrounding this exemption, see AHCMB, ARM2, P1, CP2, Expedient 8 and the discussion in Alonso and Rodríguez, 'Beneficència il.lustrada', pp. 821-2. Similar privileges applied to boys from the orphanage in Amsterdam, *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin and *La Trinité* in Paris, with similar opposition from the guilds in the last case: see McCants, p. 64, Zucca Micheletto, p. 209 and Haru Crowston, pp. 418-20.

⁷⁶ AHCMB, AF9, C3, Lligall 3, numero 1.

100 *lliures* each for 12 girls from the *Misericòrdia*.⁷⁷ Moreover, in 1772, the *Reial Audiència* passed a decree ordering the guilds to admit to master status free of charge any journeyman artisan who married a girl from the *Misericòrdia*. The proportion of women recorded as leaving in order to marry is much smaller than that entering the labour market, however, despite McCants' claim that Catholic poor relief institutions prepared women for marriage rather than for the labour market.⁷⁸ Indeed, the *Misericòrdia* may have offered women better chances with regard to employment than English workhouses.⁷⁹

V

Poor relief in Spain has received little attention to date, and little is known about the characteristics and lives of the poor. This study has presented new data on the ages, origins, marital status and circumstances surrounding the entries and exits of 4,063 male inmates of the Barcelona workhouse over the period 1780-1803. These data complement earlier work by Carbonell on 6,176 female inmates for the period 1762-1803. Together, they show that the population of the workhouse was overwhelmingly young and single, and from outside Barcelona. Males entered in greater numbers than females, but stayed for less time. Surprisingly, elderly men had a greater presence in the workhouse than elderly women, relative to the age structure of the Catalan population. Males were more likely to escape than females and far less likely to be reclaimed by family, at least as far as the records show.

More importantly, this paper has sought to qualify the traditional emphasis on the role of the Mediterranean family as provider of support to kin in need. Kin did matter to the poor of Catalonia, and ties of family loyalty and responsibility did exist, but often they were fragile. For some, entry into the workhouse testified to this fragility: abandonment, *de facto* divorce and punishment were all reasons for entry. Many married men and women were in the workhouse without their spouses, most children were there without their parents. Many inmates were immigrants, drawn in by the demand for skilled labour in the new textile mills and the construction industry, only to resort to institutional care during the many downturns in the economy. The role of the workhouse in substituting for kin in an urban setting, however, should not be overplayed. Many who entered from outside Barcelona came straight to the workhouse from rural areas, where kin were available but unable to help. For many families, institutional care was not a negation of family ties but rather the easiest means to fulfil responsibilities towards dependents. By placing the elderly and, above all, the young, in the workhouse, families could weather short-term crises and balance production with consumption. For the young, who made up the bulk of the workhouse population, families also practised a long-term strategy, that of securing entry into the labour and, for women, the marriage market. This paper has emphasised the importance of the training offered to children and adolescents within the workhouse and the numerous ways in which entry into both markets was smoothed through easier access to guilds, recruitment into domestic service, the army and navy, and the provision of dowries.

Jane Humphries has recently shown that the boundaries between 'nuclear' and 'extended' were blurred among the families of the poor in industrial revolution Britain.⁸⁰ In terms of family ties, poor families were less 'weak' than the traditional historiography has suggested, with the poor drawing on kin and institutional welfare in a complex and shifting 'mixed economy of welfare'. We argue similarly that the family ties of the poor in industrialising Barcelona were less 'strong' than has been suggested, and no less complex and changing. The idea of 'strong' versus 'weak' family ties in southern versus northern Europe is not without foundation, but we question its applicability to the households of the poor.

⁷⁷ Amat i de Cortada, *Calaix de sastre*, vol. IV, p. 159. 100 *lliures* was a considerable sum; most dowry funds for poor girls paid 25 *lliures*. Dowries were also paid by the *Ospedale di Carità* in Turin: see Zucca Micheletto, p. 211.

⁷⁸ McCants, p. 83.

⁷⁹ Humphries, 'Care', pp. 131-4.

⁸⁰ Humphries, *Childhood and child labour*, pp. 151-71.

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